



Lodovico Dolce

Lausten, Pia Schwarz

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Lodovico Dolce

DATE OF BIRTH 1508 or 1510
 PLACE OF BIRTH Venice
 DATE OF DEATH January 1568
 PLACE OF DEATH Venice

BIOGRAPHY

Lodovico Dolce was one of the most active intellectuals in 16th-century Venice. A prolific humanist author, translator and editor, he is mainly known and remembered for his *Dialogo della pittura* ('Dialogue on painting', 1557). Not much is known about his life. He was born in 1508 or more likely 1510 into an old family that had once, but no longer, enjoyed access to the Great Council. His father died when he was two years old, and he was then entrusted to two patrician families: the Doge Leonardo Loredan (1436-1521), and the Cornaro family, who financed his studies in Padua. After his studies, he returned to Venice, where he worked first as a teacher for children, and then as an editor at the Giolito publishing house, where he remained until his death. He was buried in the Venetian church of S. Luca Evangelista.

Dolce was extremely productive as an editor, translator, commentator and author, probably partly because his poor circumstances forced him to work assiduously to support himself and his family.

In all, he was responsible for 358 works, including 96 works of his own, while, as an editor at the Giolito publishing house, he supervised editions of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto, Bembo and Castiglione. He also edited *Le sei giornate* by Sebastiano Erizzo (1567), in which are included three stories with 'Turkish' motifs, and in 1563 he edited a collection of fictional letters from Mehmed II to (primarily) European princes, *Lettere del Gran Mahumeto imperadore de' Turchi scritte a diversi re, prencipi, signori, e repubbliche con le risposte loro* ('Letters from the Great Mehmed, emperor of the Turks, written to various kings, princes, lords, and republics together with their answers'). This work had originally been composed in Latin by Laudivius Zacchia (1473), and was translated into Italian by Dolce. His immense influence on the transmission of literary texts is beyond doubt: to cite one example, his edition of Dante's *Comedia* (1555) was the first to describe it with the epithet 'divine'.

Among his own works there are comedies (*Ragazzo*, 1541), tragedies (*Marianna*, 1565), and prose dialogues such as *Dialogo della institution delle donne* (1545) and the better known *Dialogo della pittura intitolato l'Aretino* (1557). Even though it is commonly held that he was a 'mediocre versifier' (Romei, 'Lodovico Dolce', p. 10), he showed a lifelong devotion to the genre of chivalric romance, not only editing and commenting on Ariosto, but also publishing his own epic poems in *ottava rima* imitating Boiardo and Ariosto, among them *Sacripante* (1535) and *Le prime imprese del conte Orlando* (posthumous, 1572). His poem *Stanze composte per la vittoria Africana* (1535), written at the age of 25 or 27, is inspired by this particular tradition, even though it is not a courtly poem but belongs to popular culture. In his later *Vita di Carlo Quinto* (1561), Dolce treats the most popular historical figure of his time, the Emperor Charles V, presenting him as a Christian champion just as he had in *Stanze composte per la vittoria Africana*.

He was considered by some 18th-century scholars a simple 'taster' of literary genres (Tiraboschi, cited in Romei, 'Lodovico Dolce'), but for scholars nowadays he rather represents a new professional figure: the editor and the cultural mediator. He was very sensitive and open to changing literary trends (sometimes compared to Pietro Aretino), and to the taste of the reading public: as he said in his preface to Tasso's *Amadigi* (1560), it is necessary to 'adjust to the needs of the century in which one writes'.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

For early sources on Dolce, see R.H. Terpening, *Lodovico Dolce. Renaissance man of letters*, Toronto, 1997, pp. 3-8

Secondary

Terpening, *Lodovico Dolce* (the most detailed study of Dolce, including a list of all his works, pp. 257-69)

G. Romei, art. 'Lodovico Dolce', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 40

C. di Filippo Bareggi, *Il mestiere di scrivere. Lavoro intellettuale e mercato librario a Venezia nel Cinquecento*, Rome, 1988

E. Antonio Cicogna, 'Memoria intorno alla vita e gli scritti di Messer Lodovico Dolce letterato veneziano del secolo XVI', *Memorie dell'I.R. Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere e arti* 11 (1863-84) 93-200

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

*Stanze composte nella vittoria Africana novamente
avuta dal sacratissimo Imperatore Carlo Quinto,
'Stanzas composed on the African victory recently
won by the most holy Emperor Charles V'
Stanze per la vittoria Africana, 'Stanzas for the
African victory'*

DATE 1535

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Italian

DESCRIPTION

Lodovico Dolce's *Stanze composte nella vittoria Africana* consists of a prologue in prose and 147 unnumbered stanzas in *ottava rima*. There is no modern edition, though a facsimile copy of the first printed edition can be found in Beer and Ivaldi, *Guerre in ottava rima. IV. Guerre contro i Turchi (1453-1570)*, pp. 457-512.

The poem treats the Christian capture of Tunis from the Ottomans in 1535. It is dedicated to Don Lopes Soria, ambassador in Italy of the Habsburg Empire (1528-32). The prologue pays tribute to Charles V, called 'the true father of the universal homeland of the baptised', and it praises his triumphs, his piety and valour. Dolce modestly calls his text 'a little work', composed in only two days.

In the first seven introductory stanzas, Charles V is praised as the saviour of all Christians, a 'new Charles' who brings peace and protects against barbaric fury. Dolce asks his readers to listen to this 'real' account of Charles instead of giving attention to the 'fabulous old texts', by which he probably means earlier epic poems with their fictional wars and heroes. This appears to be a sign of Dolce's 'undoubted awareness' of a need among his contemporaries to reorient themselves towards reality and matters of contemporary history (Dionisotti, 'La guerra', p. 173).

The poem presents Charles V as if he were a crusader freeing the Holy Land from Saracens. The following stanzas (8-27) describe him and his army: he gathers his people together, and makes a speech inciting his soldiers to war and promising victory; not a war against Italy which is already 'tired and afflicted', but against the enemies of Christ who have attacked Vienna and who have caused much pain to the Christians. It is a 'just' war intended to punish the thief, Barbarossa.

Barbarossa's preparations are also described (28-33), and then the campaign begins. The Christians go ashore (34-56), construct strongholds, and engage in a series of battles with the Turks. A group of Greek slaves who have escaped from Barbarossa join the imperial army, and inform Charles about Barbarossa's preparations (57-75). Dolce takes this opportunity to give a long description of the Turkish army and Barbarossa (60-76), detailing the Turkish soldiers' appearance (they wear long shirts, look like women, are barefoot, unshaven and smelly), and Barbarossa's army (most are badly dressed, with long hair, and carry only bows and poisoned arrows). Barbarossa himself is strong, intelligent and fast, with the cunning of Ulysses.

The attack on Tunis is then described in detail (76-110). When they capture the city, the Christians free the prisoners, and Barbarossa is forced to escape to Algeria (124-32). Finally, Charles's achievements here and elsewhere are praised.

The poem is one of Dolce's very first works, and he may have wished to obtain a position at court with it. It certainly contributes to Habsburg imperial propaganda and to the creation of the myth of Charles V as the saviour and leader of all Christians, a 'new Charles' who brings peace and protects against barbarians. In making him the successor to the Roman Empire, and the heir and direct scion of Charlemagne, Dolce employs a rhetorical combination of classical and Christian motifs that had been introduced by the Italian humanists in the 14th and 15th centuries, beginning with Petrarch. The same intertwinement is found in Charles's triumphal entries throughout the Empire, from 1529 up to his funeral procession in 1558, and 'crystallized in the Emperor's Triumphal Entry into Rome in 1536' after the conquest of Tunis (Pinson, 'Imperial ideology').

Throughout the poem, the Muslims are characterised as a proud, self-confident, cruel and uncivilised people in comparison with the more civilised Christians. This stereotypical presentation is reflected in the dishevelled appearances of the Turks, while the way in which they ride their horses bareback, together with their 'strange' language, contributes to creating the impression of primitiveness. The adjective repeatedly used of them is *strani* ('strange'), rhymed with *vani* ('futile'). Islam is presented as an unjust and foolish religion, with a God (wrongly called Muhammad) who does not listen to its followers or understand them.

At the same time, however, the poem also expresses some admiration for the Turks when it describes the rich and beautiful clothes and

helmets of some of the soldiers, and when it presents Barbarossa as comparable in quick-mindedness to Ulysses.

Poems in *ottava rima* became the most popular kind of publication in the first 50 years after the invention of printing. There were those inspired by such masters of literary narrative as Boccaccio and Ariosto, and those inspired by oral *cantari*. Early pamphlets in *ottava rima* dealing with various military battles, such as Dolce's *Stanze*, are closer to the popular, oral tradition than to the literary (cf. Wilhelm, *Italienische Flugschriften*, p. 123 n. 2), though Dolce also seems to be influenced by Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1532), which he edited and commented on in the 1530s.

These war accounts in *ottava rima* functioned as a kind of journalistic report, following the most important battles. They were written by both anonymous poets and named authors.

SIGNIFICANCE

According to Terpening, Dolce's *Stanze* may have influenced Tasso, whose lines at the start of *Gerusalemme liberata* are similar to those of Dolce (Terpening, *Lodovico Dolce*, pp. 30-31, referring to V. Vivaldi, *La Gerusalemme liberata studiata nelle sue fonti*, Trani, 1901). According to Vivaldi, Tasso was an admirer of Dolce's works, and Dolce's poem *Prima-leone, figliuolo di Palmerino* (1562) could have been of significance for the duel of Tancredi and Clorinda.

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

Stanze di M. Lodovico Dolce. Composte nella vittoria africana novamente havuta dal sacratissimo imperatore. Carolo Quinto, Paris, 2007 (CD-ROM)

Stanze di m. Lodovico Dolce composte nella vittoria africana nuovamente havuta dal sacratis. imperatore Carlo Quinto, Romae, 1535 (facsimile copy in M. Beer and C. Ivaldi, *Guerre in ottava rima*, Modena, 1989, iv, pp. 457-512)

Stanze di m. Lodovico Dolce composte nella vittoria africana nuovamente havuta dal sacratis. imperatore Carlo Quinto. Se vendeno a la botega de mestro Giovanne Antonio apresso a la Dugana, Genova: per Antonio Bellone, 1535

STUDIES

S. Giazzon, *Venezia in coturno. Lodovico Dolce tragediografo (1543-1557)*, Rome, 2011

A. Neuschäfer, *Lodovico Dolce als dramatischer Autor im Venedig des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main, 2004

Y. Pinson, 'Imperial ideology in the triumphal entry into Lille of Charles V and the Crown Prince (1549)', *Assaph. Studies in Art History* 6 (2001) 205-32, <http://www2.tau.ac.il/InternetFiles/Segel/Art/UserFiles/file/ogpinson.pdf>

Terpening, *Lodovico Dolce* (contains useful bibliographical information on Dolce's original works, editions and translations)

R. Wilhelm, *Italienische Flugschriften des Cinquecento (1500-1550). Gattungsgeschichte und Sprachgeschichte*, Tübingen, 1996 (in particular the chapter 'Flugschriften in ottava rima: die historia', pp. 123-204, which contains information and many references important for this topic, in particular on the history and evolution of the genre and its linguistic and stylistic characteristics)

Romei, 'Lodovico Dolce'

di Filippo Bareggi, *Il mestiere di scrivere*

C. Dionisotti, 'La guerra d'Oriente nella letteratura veneziana del Cinquecento', in *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*, Turin, 1967, 163-82

Pia Schwarz Lausten